22 JUNE 2013 / CAIRO - Strengthening countries' abilities to **control**, **detect**, and **treat case s of MERS-CoV infection**
are among the most urgent actions needed at national level to stem the growing outbreak of disease caused by the virus, over 100 public health experts meeting at WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office agreed.

The experts, who came from all countries in the Middle East and North Africa and Europe which have already registered MERS-CoV cases, and from throughout WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR), agreed that there is a list of priority actions which need to be agreed internationally and implemented nationally.

At an international level, fast and complete reporting of cases, with contact histories, clinical care and treatment outcomes in as much detail as possible, and collected in a uniform manner across countries, is necessary for the international public health community to be able to build up a picture of what works and what doesn't in combatting this virus.

"Having the same tools and protocols in all countries allows us to draw on and implement best practice from around the world, and to pool our information and resources most effectively on an international level," said Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the EMR, who chaired the meeting. "This meeting has taken us an important step in that direction."

“At the moment we have an important window where cases have still been relatively few and human transmission is relatively limited,” added Dr Keiji Fukuda, WHO Assistant Director-General for Health Security and the Environment. “We need to exploit this chance to agree and implement the best public health measures possible across the board for, in so doing, we stand the best chance of controlling this virus before it spreads further.”

The meeting agreed that a series of actions in seven key areas were key to increasing Member States’ and the international community’s ability to prepare for, control, detect, alert the world to, and treat cases of diseases caused by MERS-CoV. These areas are surveillance, mass gatherings preparation, clinical management of cases, laboratory diagnostics, infection control, communications, and International Health Regulation (2005) reporting.

Participants agreed, for example, that every country should enhance surveillance for severe acute respiratory illness in accordance with prevailing local situation and urgently investigate any cluster of pneumonia with unusual clinical presentations, or any immune-compromised patient or healthcare worker with any unusual sign of acute respiratory infection. Furthermore, Member States should share data with WHO and report any confirmed and probable cases of MERS-CoV within 24 hours of classification.

In the area of mass gatherings, the participants agreed that Member States should to develop specific plans when MERS-CoV might be an additional risk for an event, and they also highlighted the need for standardised protocols for serological testing, and systematic and sequential sample collection.

In the area of communications, the value of fast and transparent reporting of cases both to the public and to WHO via the system of International Health Regulations National Focal Points was highlighted, while the needs to better understand the probability and means of hospital-based transmission of the disease, and to ensure hospitals had adequate knowledge and facilities to treat cases, including the most severe ones, were also highlighted.

“Collecting and sharing epidemiological, clinical, immunologic, and genetic information related to MERS-CoV infections in the right way is essential if the disease is to be better characterized in terms of source, exposure and presentation. Coordinated and intersectoral global action to increase regional and inter-regional collaboration between countries, WHO and other international partners is vital,” the meeting concluded.